

**CRUTCHES**

A ten-minute play

by

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CAST OF CHARACTERS:

ANDREW, late 20s.  
SUSAN, his sister, late 20s.

SETTING:

The family home, rural Arkansas, present day.

THE LIGHTS RISE on a living room, decorated for Christmas. Maybe even a Christmas tree. There is a fireplace (which can be seen or suggested.). SUSAN, late 20s, embraces her brother, ANDREW, also late 20s. Andrew has a bag.

ANDREW

I'm home!

SUSAN

Merry Christmas!

(They part. She sizes him up.)

God you look different.

ANDREW

Do I?

SUSAN

It must be all those years apart. You moving away and living in the big city and being a part of all that culture and meanwhile your family sits here in its hovel in the rural south and resents you for abandoning us as much as we envy the fact that you're able to escape.

ANDREW

Wow, I never expected that to be communicated so succinctly.

SUSAN

Yes, well I thought I'd get it all out of the way so we could have a nice holiday together.

ANDREW

Very good. Where are the parents?

SUSAN

Off to the Christmas Eve service.

ANDREW

Why didn't you go with them?

SUSAN

I gave up on the substance of this holiday years ago. You?

ANDREW

This holiday has substance?

(They laugh. ANDREW warms himself by the fire for a moment.)

ANDREW

One thing I miss, living in San Diego. An excuse to have a fireplace.

SUSAN

Makes a mess. Stinks up the place.

ANDREW

That's my sis, looking on the bright side.

(SUSAN shrugs.)

So how've you been?

SUSAN

I'm still on the anti-psychotics, but I've gotten the dosage down really low now.

ANDREW

That's good to hear.

SUSAN

Whatever works, right?

ANDREW

Right.

(Slight pause.)

So did you find my Christmas present?

SUSAN

Was I supposed to get you something special?

ANDREW

Remember? I asked you to find Aunt Sallie's crutches for me.

SUSAN

Oh, those stupid old things. Of course. I forgot.

ANDREW

Did you find them? I told you where to look.

SUSAN

Mom's done so much moving stuff around. She throws a lot of things out, you know.

ANDREW

So they're not in my bedroom closet?

SUSAN

No, she turned that thing into a guest bedroom ages ago. You've been gone a while, you know.

ANDREW

I've only missed two Christmases.

SUSAN

That's three years.

ANDREW

Less than.

SUSAN

I don't know why you'd want those things anyway. They're just a couple of old sticks of wood.

ANDREW

I need something to hang in our bedroom and we have this great vintage photograph of Jonathan's grandfather and some other rustic-looking items and I could hang the crutches on the wall near the photo. A little contribution from my family.

SUSAN

Who'd ever heard of hanging a couple of stupid crutches on a wall?

ANDREW

They'll look great. If I remember them correctly they'll compliment the coffee color we've painted the walls. I have some leftover fabric from the drapes I made that I'm going to use to hang them with.

SUSAN

You're going to have to talk to Mom about them when she gets back. I don't have a clue.

ANDREW

I'll go digging around. Maybe I'll find something.

(She blocks his way.)

SUSAN

Don't you want to unpack first?

ANDREW

I can do that and look a little at the same time.

SUSAN

Maybe you want to have some eggnog then?

ANDREW

Not really.

SUSAN

Boiled custard? Remember that stuff? Like eggnog but gross? We can spike it with Grandma's bourbon and get a little loaded before Mom and Dad get here.

ANDREW

No thanks. I'd rather just find the crutches.

SUSAN

Here, let me do it.

(She starts off.)

ANDREW

No, it's fine.

(He exits. She paces, fidgets. He re-enters. He is holding the small, carved crutches. A quiet beat, then--)

Why...why were they in your bed?

(Slight pause.)

SUSAN

Uhm, I sleep with them.

ANDREW

Why?

SUSAN

Because I do. Don't tell me I'm crazy.

ANDREW

Why didn't you just say something?

SUSAN

You wouldn't have understood.

ANDREW

You're right. I don't. Did you not think I'd find them? What were you--

SUSAN

I didn't know what I was doing. I was going to try to explain. I--

ANDREW

They were tucked under the covers like a married couple. Like a composition for a Magritte painting.

SUSAN

I know.

ANDREW

That's fucked up.

SUSAN

It's not. They...they keep me company.

ANDREW

Do Mom and Dad know about this?

SUSAN

Yes, why?

ANDREW

Don't they think it's weird?

SUSAN

Well yeah.

ANDREW

You're not doing anything, uhm--

SUSAN

God! I'm mentally ill, I'm not a pervert.

ANDREW

I just don't know if this is healthy--

SUSAN

If I were a grown woman sleeping with a teddy bear you wouldn't bat an eye.

ANDREW

Right. Right!

(He starts digging in his bag. Pulls out a teddy bear.)

I was going to give this to one of the cousins, but here! Merry Christmas!

SUSAN

Could you just go put them back where you found them, please?

ANDREW

I don't think that's a good idea. Besides, they are rightfully mine, and--

SUSAN

You're going to try to take them from me?

ANDREW

Are you serious? Look, I don't mind you...enjoying them...while I'm away, but now--

SUSAN

What, now you need something to hang on your coffee-flavored walls? Next to some tintype of an old man who's probably spinning in his grave at knowing he's part of his decorator grandson's decorating motif?

ANDREW

Jonathan designs commercial spaces. He's not a decorator. And just because he comes from a family of missionaries doesn't mean they're not supportive.

SUSAN

Oh I'm sorry. You're right. I'm sure both Aunt Sallie and Missionary Gramps would love to have their artifacts hanging in some fag couple's bedroom.

ANDREW

Don't be mean. And what do you even know about Jonathan or his family, anyway?

SUSAN

Nothing. You won't bother to bring him home to meet me the past two Christmases you've...oh wait...you never bothered to bring yourself home either.

ANDREW

You never come out to visit us.

SUSAN

Because I can't afford to.



ANDREW

Because you don't bother to work.

SUSAN

This novel isn't going to write itself!

ANDREW

But you're going to write it?

SUSAN

I have been trying to carry the whole of the southern experience on my shoulders through the kind of writing that hasn't been seen out of this region in decades, and you can do nothing but ridicule me!

ANDREW

Well when you make a statement like that--

SUSAN

No, I can't possibly have the wherewithal to finish a novel, can I? And it couldn't possibly be substantive.

ANDREW

No, you're too busy cuddling up with a couple of pieces of wood to do anything else!

SUSAN

Give me the crutches.

ANDREW

No.

SUSAN

Andrew, I mean it.

ANDREW

Look, Susan, after Aunt Sallie died I found these in the barn and I rescued them right before the place was torn down and the boards were sold for arts and crafts projects. Mom and Grandpa were going to leave the crutches and I saved them. No one else wanted them. Not even Grandpa, who made the things for her. You certainly didn't--

SUSAN

And where was I then, Andrew?

(Slight pause.)

SUSAN (CONT'D)

I was in Children's Hospital in Little Rock. You were a smart, curious little boy and I was getting my meds stabilized. What shape was I in to lay claim to anything?

ANDREW

I'm sorry, Susan. I just think this behavior is.... I'm taking them out to the rental, okay?

(He tries to exit. She lunges for him, grabs at the crutches. They struggle. When they separate, she has one in her hand, he has one in his.)

Why do you have to be this way? Why can't you just--

SUSAN

Say it. Just say it.

ANDREW

Why can't you just be well?

SUSAN

Why can't you just stay in fucking San Diego in your progressive fucking blue-state well-adjusted committed gay relationship, huh? You've already missed two Christmases, what's one more?

(Pause.)

ANDREW

I, I wish I knew what to say. I just don't understand this, I don't understand you....

SUSAN

Have you ever once asked me about the novel I'm writing?

ANDREW

I don't recall.

SUSAN

It's about a lonely old woman. A cripple.

ANDREW

Aunt Sallie.

SUSAN

Aunt Sallie, who burned her legs so badly when she was eight years old she never really recovered. Aunt Sallie, who died alone and crippled and scarred and wounded.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

Aunt Sallie who, barely eight years old, stood in that tall grass, watching it burn as the flames approached, stunned into stillness, into silence. No one got to her in time. Not Mom, not Grandpa. No one could help her. She was stranded. Alone.

ANDREW

Listen, if you object to them being on my wall then we can call the County Arts Council and see if they have an interest. Maybe they'll fit into an exhibit or...I don't know. You think I'm being superficial but I remember all the scarring. The canes. The lifelong bandages. The suffering. I want to pay tribute. To honor it.

SUSAN

I live it.

ANDREW

Don't say--

SUSAN

They comfort me. They're mine. You can't have them, do you understand me?

ANDREW

Listen to yourself.

SUSAN

Please!

(Slight pause.)

Just let me keep them until the after tomorrow and you can call the arts people, okay?

ANDREW

I don't want to have to go through this again, Susan.

SUSAN

You won't. Just give it to me and I'll--

ANDREW

No.

SUSAN

I'm not giving you mine.

ANDREW

Then what are we going to do?

SUSAN

Give it to me, Andrew. Give it to me or I'll take the one I have and I'll splinter it into little slivers and use it for toothpicks! I'll chop it up into pieces and I'll use it for firewood!

ANDREW

Firewood.

(He walks to the fireplace. He stands a moment, then--)

SUSAN

Andrew, wait.

(He tosses it in.)

Don't!

(She drops her crutch, runs over, watches it. ANDREW picks up the other one. He starts to throw it in.)

SUSAN

No!

ANDREW

Then here. You do it.

SUSAN

No, I don't want to, I can't! I....

(He holds it out to her.)

ANDREW

For Sallie.

(She looks at the crutch for a moment, walks to him, takes it. She stands in front of the fireplace. Pause.)

SUSAN

For Aunt Sallie.

(She throws it in. They watch the fire burn.)

CURTAIN